

Rigibahnen 2012 : Ron Smith looks at the latest developments on Europe's first rack railway

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RIGIBAHNEN 2012

Ron Smith looks at the latest developments on Europe's first rack railway.



The 1911 railcar
PHOTOS: Ron Smith

The Rigibahnen (RB) continues to progress and develop, however two major projects that were originally programmed for 2011 (and were reported on in SE 104) have been put back. The station at Rigi Kaltbad is an interesting operational bottleneck that was scheduled to be rebuilt last year. There is double-track up from Vitznau to a single platform face that has a parallel goods siding, then it is single track to Staffel. This means an ascending train arrives, decants passengers, then runs back over a crossover to wait on the steep slope for a descending train to arrive, pick up passengers and continue down to Vitznau. The ascending train then continues its journey to the summit. The plan was to demolish the existing station and start again. The former siding was to become a loop with its own platform and a new siding installed parallel to that. The goods facilities are necessary as the mountain is free of motor vehicles so all supplies come up by rail. This includes the vast quantities of building materials currently required to build the large new Spa development at the resort (see www.acqua-spa-resorts.ch) which is expected to generate 100,000 trips in the first year

alone – a major new source of traffic for the RB. The station is now expected to be demolished in 2012, utilising funding expected from the tourism development aspect of the work.

At Arth Goldau, the reconstruction saga continues. The RB station, on a metal bridge spanning the SBB tracks, requires renovation whilst the SBB would like it raised by some 0.5m as the low structure means that pantographs have to be squeezed under it resulting in a speed restriction. Originally it was to be totally removed with the RB tracks curved down to a platform parallel to the SBB ones, and the existing station underpass extended. This would have been an expensive option, plus the SBB subsequently decided that they cannot release the track there, as with their ever growing volume of traffic they now consider that they will need it. A further complication is that the bridge has been classified as a historical monument, meaning that it cannot simply be scrapped, therefore the bridge stays as it is until a source of suitable funding can be found under some historic building repair scheme.

Expecting all this activity to take place in 2011 lead the RB to decide to withdraw all steam services last year as the line would be too busy, and the operational staff stretched due to all the extra freight trains moving plant, machinery, building materials and waste for the new Spa. With the railway rebuilding activities now postponed, there will now not be any steam in 2012, as the opportunity has been taken to programme some overhauls and repairs. Both of the RB steam locomotives, No.16 of 1923 and No.17 of 1925, are going to have boiler tubes replaced. However, steam is

A Voralpen Express at Arth Goldau with the old Rigibahnen terminus above in July 2008.



promised to return in 2013. Last year was the centenary of the Arth Rigi Bahn electric power car No.6, believed to be the oldest working one in the world. There are no special anniversaries of other rolling stock in 2012 but the continuing upgrading and renovation of existing stock continues.

Next to the "Rigi Event" structure at Rigi Staffel there is a restaurant whose current franchise expires this April so the RB intends to take it over and run it themselves - the first time they have entered into the catering business. It is called the "Bahnhöfli" - hopefully they will change this to something more universally pronounceable! Also in 2012 the RB will promote the usual range of imaginative offers, such as the sunrise trip to the summit, the sunset dinners available suspended in the Weggis to Kaltbad cable car and the opportunity to sleep on straw in a "farmhouse experience"! Available from early 2012 will be new Apps for computers/i-pads etc; a new Rigibahnen book, written and illustrated by your author and Bernhard Studer (will also be available from the SRS); and also a new guide book available for the RB with much more English language content.

Interestingly there is a mountain in China's Sichuan Province called Emei (or Emei Shan) which at 3099m is the highest of the four Buddhist Mountains in China. Buddhism entered China here in the 1st Century AD; it has many temples on it; it became a UNESCO world heritage site in 1996; and it is also credited with being the home of Chinese boxing. In silhouette it is remarkably similar to the profile of Mount Rigi, and is a similar size. It is served by two aerial cableways, one of which was built by the Garaventa Company of Goldau. The two mountains are now "Twinned" with an increasing level of exchange and co-operation between them something which is resulting in more Chinese visitors to the Rigibahnen.

For up to date details of the railway go to www.rigi.ch This is a very good web site, showing all the details that you

would expect, and also their shop, gift vouchers, plus hotels on the Rigi. ☝

Special offer for SRS Members. If you would like the new 2012 Rigibahnen guide book, email your SRS Membership Number, name and full postal address with post code to info@rigi.ch. The book will be sent to you together with an exclusive Rigi Chocolate bar! This is in the form of Riggensbach's rack rail. This offer is valid until 31st May 2012, and is limited to one application per member.



ABOVE: No 3 at Kaltbad - 21.06.09.

BELOW: Rigi No. 5 tipping building material at Kaltbad.



GENÈVE NEWS

Gordon Wiseman

Station renaming

In an attempt to avoid local confusion, CFF/SBB renamed two stations on the Genève – La Plaine line from the 11th December 2011. Cointrin was renamed Vernier and Vernier-Meyrin was renamed Meyrin. This was the latter's second renaming in a few years, having been renamed from Vieux Bureau when the original Vernier Meyrin station was closed. Work to convert part of the route from 1.5kV dc to 25kV ac electrification has started.

Chene Bourg replaces Eaux Vives

The new station at Chene Bourg was opened without any ceremony whatsoever on the morning of Sunday 11th December two weeks after Genève Eaux Vives closed for the last time to allow for the start of the construction of the CEVA cross city line. The first train arrived from Annemasse at 09.25. The station is built on part of the original westbound platform and consists of a single platform the length of one of SNCF's single AGC three-car multiple units. Two platform shelters have been installed and are second-hand from the Canton Vaud complete with posters and stickers suggesting provenance from the VMCV and NStCM systems. The original station building has not been reused but, being architecturally significant, relocated in its entirety to avoid being demolished. See *NOTEPAD*.

Bernex tramway

Genève transport operator TPG inaugurated its new Line 14 to Bernex on the 10th December almost exactly 51-years after the original route to Bernex was closed as part of the cull that took Genève's extensive original tram network down to just a single route. A four tram parade led by two of TPG's new Stadler Tangos ran from the Ponts de l'Ille (near Bel-Air) to Bernex via the intermediate communes of Grand Lancy and Onex. Free travel was on offer from 13.00 – 17.00 that afternoon, with historic bogie trams Nos. 67, 70 and 2-axle No.125 all with accurate original destination boards offering a nostalgic element. ☝